

FRANCHISE FIRSTS

Concepts That Bring Innovation to Franchising

by Mark Henricks

If you could travel back in time to visit a franchised business of 50 years ago, you would see many similarities to today's franchises. For instance, standard signage, menus, employee uniforms, and operating procedures were as common for franchisees then as they are today. But franchising has nonetheless changed enormously and has seen countless firsts and innovations over the years, decades, and centuries it has existed.

The first franchises were likely governmental and religious ones: States and churches once granted other private and public entities the rights to collect taxes and administer regions. Today, franchises are generally considered to be business deals between for-profit commercial enterprises. The modern business format franchise grants a franchisee the right to conduct business using the trademarks, processes, and other assets of the franchiser. That has been the standard franchise format, generally speaking, for the last century or so. But within that basic framework lies ample room for being first with innovation.

helping children learn and reach their potential. The Goddard School accommodates these franchise investors with a dual management style, in which franchisees are responsible for the operation of the business, while an experienced director is brought in to implement the educational program.

This approach is well-suited to the typical The Goddard School franchisee's talents and interests, says Jim DiRuggeris, vice president of franchise development for the King of Prussia, Pennsylvania-based franchiser. "What initially attracts someone to inquire about The Goddard School is their passion for children and early childhood education," he says. "Most of our franchisees do not have any type of early childhood education background but clearly see the value of it."

The Goddard School leverages the power of the concept by implementing robust mentoring programs in which franchisees work with other, more experienced franchisees to fine-tune their operations. The approach has helped the franchise network grow to 428 schools in 35 states.



The Goddard School has led the way by providing a franchise opportunity for people who don't have educational backgrounds but want to be involved in

Most locations for The Goddard School are in affluent suburban communities, but the company is extending a new urban school format designed to appeal to families in city centers. Within the next 12 months, DiRuggeris anticipates they'll add 30 new school locations, targeting markets including Texas, California,

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*Entrepreneur magazine, January 2002-2015 | †Average based on 2014, as stated in Item 19 of our Franchise Disclosure Document. 180 of 392 (40.8%) of franchises in this group did as well or better than the average. Your individual results may vary. There is no assurance you'll earn as much. | ‡Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization. | ™Child Care in America; 2014 State Fact Sheets; "Child Care Aware" of America, 2014, Web. 6 June 2015.

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Minnesota, and Michigan. “There are a lot of growth opportunities for our brand,” DiRuggeris says.



Snap Fitness has grown its chain of affordable, 24-hour gym and fitness centers to approximately 2,000 locations in 18 countries in part by appealing to franchisees with an exceptionally well-developed and smoothly operating franchisee start-up and support system. “What sets our brand apart from the competition is our fully-integrated process,” says Peter Taunton, president and CEO of the Chanhassen, Minnesota-based company. “From buying a franchise to celebrating a grand opening, the turnkey systems and world-class support we have in place allow prospects to become owners seamlessly.”

The company also has an in-house finance division that helps franchisees get the best value-added services and products for their money, Taunton adds. “When you partner with Snap Fitness, you have a team of experts guiding you all the way through your franchise journey,” he says. “We’re truly a one-stop shop for all phases of bringing your location to life: real estate, build-out, marketing, and more.”

As one of the multiple franchise concepts under the Lift Brands umbrella, Snap Fitness has a wide-ranging and energetic vision for expansion opportunities. During the next year, the company anticipates continuing to grow rapidly and broadly. “As we continue to grow the Snap Fitness brand, every market is a target,” Taunton says. “We hope to have a location open every day somewhere around the world.”

Bricks 4 Kidz enables franchisees to build successful businesses by offering classes, camps, and after-

school programs that teach kids principles of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) using LEGO brand plastic building bricks. The St. Augustine, Florida-based company’s educational play offerings include project kits and theme-based models and are entertaining enough to be requested for children’s birthday parties. At the same time, building the models helps young learners figure out how things work while also encouraging and exploring their own creativity. Manipulating the small plastic parts even helps children develop fine motor skills.

The global attraction of the LEGO brand name encourages parents to sign kids up for classes, reducing the need for intensive marketing efforts. And because the LEGO brand has been prominent for a long time, parents who get exposed to the idea readily recall their childhood learning experiences with it, and are eager to enroll their own children.



The Bricks 4 Kidz business model is particularly well suited to low-overhead, home-based operation. Franchisees typically hold the programs in schools, community centers, and similar facilities so they don’t need costly retail locations, although some franchisees do have dedicated Creativity Centers.

Bricks 4 Kidz and Sew Fun Studios and Challenge Island, its affiliated franchise concepts under the Creative Learning Corp. umbrella, have more than 700 franchises in 40 countries. Bricks 4 Kidz recently opened locations in Malta and Saudi Arabia, and target growth markets include China and Europe. The company is also looking to expand the number of multi-unit operators.

Fantastic Sam’s Hair Salons’ franchise was the first to introduce the no-appointment hair salon. “We pioneered the idea that anyone could walk in off the street and get service without an appointment,” says Linda Chadwick, president and CEO of the Beverly, Massachusetts franchiser. “That’s

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commonplace today, but it was revolutionary when we created it.”

Today Fantastic Sam's offers a full range of services, specializing in serving higher-revenue hair color customers. With more than 1,100 Fantastic Sam's locations already open, Chadwick anticipates future strong growth areas will include the Mid-Atlantic region, the Southeast, California, and Texas. “We are planning strong growth in these areas, as the economy continues to grow and new housing developments target new residential communities,” she says.

SealMaster is a doubly rare entity in the franchising world. First, it is a manufacturing business. Second, it offers territories as large as entire states. Franchisees of the Sandusky, Ohio-based company manufacture and sell pavement sealer, materials, and equipment. They serve a large and growing market of public and private customers that includes federal, state, and local governments as well as pavement maintenance contractors, property management companies, and airports.

SealMaster franchisees enjoy an impressive record of financial success. Of 23 SealMaster franchises in operation at least five years, annual sales averaged \$5.2 million dollars, with a 42 percent average gross profit. SealMaster plans to offer just 48 territories in the United States and has only about 15 territories left.



When Seniors Helping Seniors co-founder and CEO Philip Yocom set out to research the local senior market 20 years ago, he identified a need for seniors to be able to live independently in their homes. Reading, Pennsylvania-based Seniors Helping Seniors was created to fill this need by providing less-active seniors with in-home, non-medical care delivered by more active seniors.

“We had no way of knowing senior in-home, non-medical care would become one of the top five most profitable segments in franchising today,” says Yocom. Yet today the business he helped pioneer has become a sizable industry. Meanwhile, Seniors Helping Seniors has expanded to more than 250 territories, and Yocom anticipates adding 60 more in a year.

Dale Carnegie Training's century-old principles are more relevant than ever, according to Jean-Louis Van Doorne, senior vice president of the New York-based franchiser. “Technology is widely available and commoditized but not people skills,” he says. “Employers are looking for people who are not only well-educated but also superbly trained.” With franchises in more than 90 countries, the company targets China, Australia, the Middle East, and Africa for growth.

Gold's Gym is celebrating 50 years in the fitness industry, and that longevity provides franchisees with an unbeatable reason to choose it, says Pete Wei, director of franchise development for the Dallas-based chain. The company has approximately 700 locations, and Wei anticipates opening 30 more during the next year, both nationally and internationally. “We've seen an aggressive expansion overseas,” Wei says.

Bruster's Real Ice Cream franchisees deliver 37 flavors chosen from nearly 150 recipes. Ice cream, cakes, pies, and waffle cones are all made fresh in the store where they are served. The Bridgewater, Pennsylvania-based franchiser has more than 190 units open and plans to top 200 units within the next year.

HomeVestors of America's powerful brand—exemplified by its “We Buy Ugly Houses” billboards—is a primary reason franchisees choose the Dallas-based residential real estate investment franchise, says co-president David Hicks. That brand helps franchisees find houses to buy, while mentorships help hone business acumen. With more than 600 franchises in 44 states, Hicks plans to add 100 in a year.

Our Town America is the first new-mover marketing company to enter franchising, and today the Pinellas Park, Florida-based franchiser has 57 franchisees in 23 states. Our Town America continues to innovate, according to Michael Plummer Jr., CEO and president, with their new Carrier Route Targeting program, which allows partnered businesses to demographically focus by neighborhood, rather than full ZIP codes.

Innovation, clearly, is a frequent theme in the history of franchising. While franchising overall is generally stable, that doesn't mean it is not changing and growing. In fact, a degree of innovation may be a requirement for survival and prosperity. At the very least, as these examples show, being first in some way is frequently a significant component of being successful in the first place.



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